

Belen Station Area Planning Study



Prepared for:

City of Belen

&

Mid-Region Council of Governments

February 2009

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the steering committee members and the citizens of Belen

Steering Committee Members

Ronnie Torres, Mayor, City of Belen
Terese Ulivarri, Councilor, City of Belen
David Lopez, Councilor, City of Belen
Andrew DiCamillo, Planner, City of Belen
Gary Barreras, City of Belen
Rod Storey, Planning & Zoning Board, City of Belen
Rudy Jaramillo, City of Belen
Sally Garley, City Manager, City of Belen
Robert Uecker, Airport Director, City of Belen Airport
Claudette Riley, Ex Director, Belen Economic Development Corp.

Tom Greer, Rail Café/ Fast Forward Development
Steve Hernandez, DMC
Tim Lardner, NM Travertine
Pete Armstrong, Greater Belen Chamber of Commerce
John Baker, Yucca Storage/Chamber of Commerce

Tony Sylvester, AICP, Special Projects Planner, MRCOG
Sandra Gaiser, AICP, Regional Planner, MRCOG
Joe Quintana, AICP, Regional Planning Manager, MRCOG
Loretta Tollefson, AICP, Special Projects Manager- RTPO, MRCOG

BNSF Representatives

Bill Stuhldreher
David Renteria

HDR Consultant Team

Sarah Ijadi, Planner, Ijadi Planning & Design
A.J. Thomas, AIA LEED AP, Project Architect, HDR
Sasha Needham, Landscape Designer, HDR
Dean Bressler, PE, Senior Project Manager, HDR
Kelly Sims, Environmental Planner, HD

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	6
Station Area Planning Study.....	6
Station Area	8
Planning Process	11
Planning Framework	11
Issues and Opportunities	12
Plan Concepts.....	18
Homecomings and Arrivals	18
Walkable Complete Neighborhoods.....	18
Where Rail Meets the Trail	18
Staying Green.....	18
PLAN ELEMENTS.....	19
Land Use and Development Patterns	19
Residential Development.....	19
Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment	27
Supporting Agriculture, Recreation and Alternative Energy.....	29
Community Agriculture.....	30
Circulation, Commuter Parking, Station Access, and Transit.....	32
Pedestrian Circulation & Connections	36
Reinken Avenue Overpass Crossing	36
Key Intersections.....	39
Way Finding	41
Multi-purpose Pathways.....	42
Station Area Shuttle	42
Bicycle Routes	44
Key Frontages and Gateways.....	45
Parks and Plazas.....	46
ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN.....	51

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Planning Area.....	10
Figure 2 Issues & Opportunities: Pedestrian Connections	15
Figure 3 Issues & Opportunities: Land Use & Development Patterns	16
Figure 4 Issues & Opportunities: Circulation, Commuter Parking & Transit.....	17
Figure 5 Schematic Plan: General Land Use	31
Figure 6 Schematic Plan: Circulation, Commuter Parking and Transit.....	35
Figure 7 Reinken Overpass Pedestrian Crossing	38
Figure 8 Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Circulation & Connections	43
Figure 9 Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Connections and Plazas & Parks	50
Figure 10 Illustrative Plan.....	52

INTRODUCTION



In communities across the country, commuter rail stations have attracted businesses, housing, and public uses and have helped make station areas valued community and economic development centers. New Mexico Rail Runner Express stations now present these opportunities to New Mexico communities.

Station Area Planning Study

The Belen Station Area Planning Study is a first step in a community planning and design process to identify issues and opportunities and explore ideas for land uses and development, circulation, public spaces and key projects for the area surrounding the New Mexico Rail Runner Express Station site.

This report is intended to provide local staff a guide for how planning and development in the station area should occur, and inform future land-use and policy decisions made by elected officials, outside agencies, and developers. The objectives, plan elements, recommendations and illustrations are based on the following vision provided by the steering committee and policies outlined in the City's planning framework including the Comprehensive Plan and the recent "Heart of Belen" Project.

Over the next 25 years with smart planning and leadership we seek to fulfill the following vision:

“The New Mexico Rail Runner Express Station will become a new focal point for our historic community; inviting visitors and welcoming commuters. New neighborhoods modeled on our traditional tree lined residential streets and rich architectural styles will create a vibrant walkable environment within a ten minute walk of the station. Our older neighborhoods will experience new infill development which contributes to the fabric of the neighborhood, while providing new homes for our children and new comers alike. Local transit, new roadway connections, pedestrian friendly street design, designated bike routes and convenient parking areas will provide a variety of transportation options and high level of ridership on the Rail Runner Express. The neighborhoods will support and will be enhanced by new plazas, parks and pathways as well as connections to the well preserved rich rural landscape that continues to provide fresh produce and lush open space.

Attracted by new growth in the station area, new businesses will revitalize our commercial properties providing goods, services and jobs to the downtown core and wider station area. Our designated and rehabilitated historic district, our unique viewing opportunities for train enthusiasts and continued support for the rail industry along with our annual cultural events, will attract visitors from communities along the Rail Runner Express route; even becoming a destination for people all over the globe who initially visit Santa Fe.

Due to the high commuter ridership, compact walkable development, mixed income neighborhoods, the preservation of our valuable rural landscape and codes with an emphasis on sustainable building practices, Belen will become a model community for the entire state”.





View looking south of Rail Runner Express station site

Station Area

The station area includes elements within a ½ mile radius of the station site with a particular focus on areas of opportunity and key elements within ¼ mile or five minute walk of the station.

The station site is located on 1.5 acres north of the Reinken Avenue Overpass on the east side of the tracks. The site is separated at ground level from the downtown core by the rail

yards where an average of 100 freight trains move through Belen each day. Immediately to the east of the station site is an established single family neighborhood; on the north, vacant and underutilized properties and to the south a large Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) parking lot.

Major pedestrian attractors in the station area are labeled with a star on Figure 1. Planning Area page 10 and are numbered as follows:

1. City Hall
2. Future Botanical Garden
3. Historic City Hall/ Future Brewery
4. Library
5. Historic Bowling Alley
6. Historic Belen Hotel
7. Dootle Bug
8. Historic Pete's Café
9. Historic Harvey House Museum
10. Anna Becker Park
11. Rail Café
12. Ben Gallegos Park
13. Casa de Abo

Additional attractors include a variety of restaurants and specialty shops.

Major employment centers include BNSF offices and rail yard, Belen Middle School, Municipal Offices, and the Belen Public School Administration Complex.

The station area also includes a portion of the **Heart of Belen Project** which focuses on revitalization of the historical district of Belen to draw residents and visitors alike to the downtown area, generating increased trade and a more vibrant and attractive community. It envisions a healthy mix of retail establishments, restaurants, quiet gathering places and a paseo that will add to the dynamic qualities and emotional pull of the place and keep people in the area longer than would be the case in typical downtowns. Covering about a quarter mile, the Heart of Belen Project extends from Baca Avenue to Dalies Avenue and from the historic Harvey House to Belen's Municipal Building on Main Street. The target street for revitalization is Becker Avenue.



Figure 1 Planning Area

February 2009

Planning Process

The planning effort took place during a six month period from June 2008 to December 2008. The process began with initial information gathering and field research by the HDR consulting team, City staff and planners from the Mid-Region Council of Governments with guidance from members of the steering committee and various public agencies. After the initial research was completed the process was organized around two ½ day workshops with the steering committee as well as on-going input from committee members. The first workshop established strong themes and key elements as well as identifying issues and opportunities to be addressed in the planning study. At the second workshop, the team presented initial ideas and schematic concepts for the steering committee to consider and build on. Feedback from the participants provided the basis for the plan elements and recommendations.

Planning Framework

City and related county, regional government policies, goals, objectives, strategies and regulations as well as community

profiles are documented in several plans and reports. Many of the goals, objectives and strategies involving land use changes, circulation and transit, code regulations and future projects are addressed in this study. Below is a list of plans and documents that form the planning framework for the study:

- Belen Comprehensive Plan- 2003
- Valencia County Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2005
- Belen Zoning Code
- City of Belen
Strategic Growth Plan (on-going)
- Valencia County Mobility Plan
- Heart of Belen Revitalization Project
- Main Street Design Guidelines
- Becker Avenue Zone- (Ord. 2005-08 § 1 (part))
- MRCOG 2030 Regional Forecast
- HDR/MRCOG Station Locations Assessment Report for Belen
- EPS Market Study

Issues and Opportunities

During the planning process, issues and opportunities were discussed as two sides of the same coin. With a focus on the vision and the opportunities that the Rail Runner Express brings to Belen, the team identified and mapped key issues, opportunities, and initial ideas to be addressed in the planning process.

Issues:

- Difficult pedestrian connections between the downtown core and Station Area including the lack of way finding elements and visible connections.
- The long walk, up and over the tracks via the Reinken Avenue Overpass to the downtown core limits the number of visitors and commuters willing to make the journey on foot.
- The lack of convenient commuter parking.
- The lack of transit options to the station from the surrounding neighborhoods and communities.
- Poor station access for cars and transit causing long waits to get in and out of station parking area.
- The lack of designated pedestrian and bike routes to the station platform from the surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

Opportunities:

- Capitalize on the regional demand for new commercial and residential uses in areas within walking distance of commuter transit services.
- Develop vacant and underutilized properties in the plan area to accommodate new residential growth in a sustainable development pattern that reflects the traditional neighborhoods of historic Belen.
- Redevelop underutilized commercial areas to enhance area vibrancy, create mixed-use pedestrian friendly neighborhoods and strengthen the local economy.
- Further develop quality public spaces, historic and community facilities to increase visitor interest and meet community needs.
- Preserve and activate the rural landscape to strengthen community ties to their rural character, contribute to environmental sustainability and capitalize on the trend for local organic produce.
- Strengthen the pedestrian connections between the east and west sides of the city.
- Provide visitors who come to watch the trains, safe and unique viewing venues.



Full commuter parking lot at the station site



The historic Kuhn Hotel just across the tracks from the station platform



Where to from here? View from the platform looking south



Vacant property north of station site



The long walk up and over Reinken Avenue to the historic district



Vacant property in the traditional neighborhoods



Rural landscape within a five minute walk of the station site



Pete's Café in the historic downtown



The historic Harvey House Museum, a regional landmark



View of the Rail Café and acequia on the station site



Becker Avenue and the Heart of Belen



Tree lined streets in the traditional neighborhoods

Pedestrian Connections Issues, Opportunities and Ideas

Designate pedestrian pathways along existing acequias and rural roads

The walk up and over Reinken Overpass limits number of visitors and commuters to the "Heart of Belen"

Improve pedestrian safety and provide wayfinding elements at key intersections

Improve streetscape along key existing streets

Establish stronger pedestrian connection between the station site and the Heart of Belen Project Area

Establish stronger pedestrian connections between the station site and commercial development along Reinken Avenue

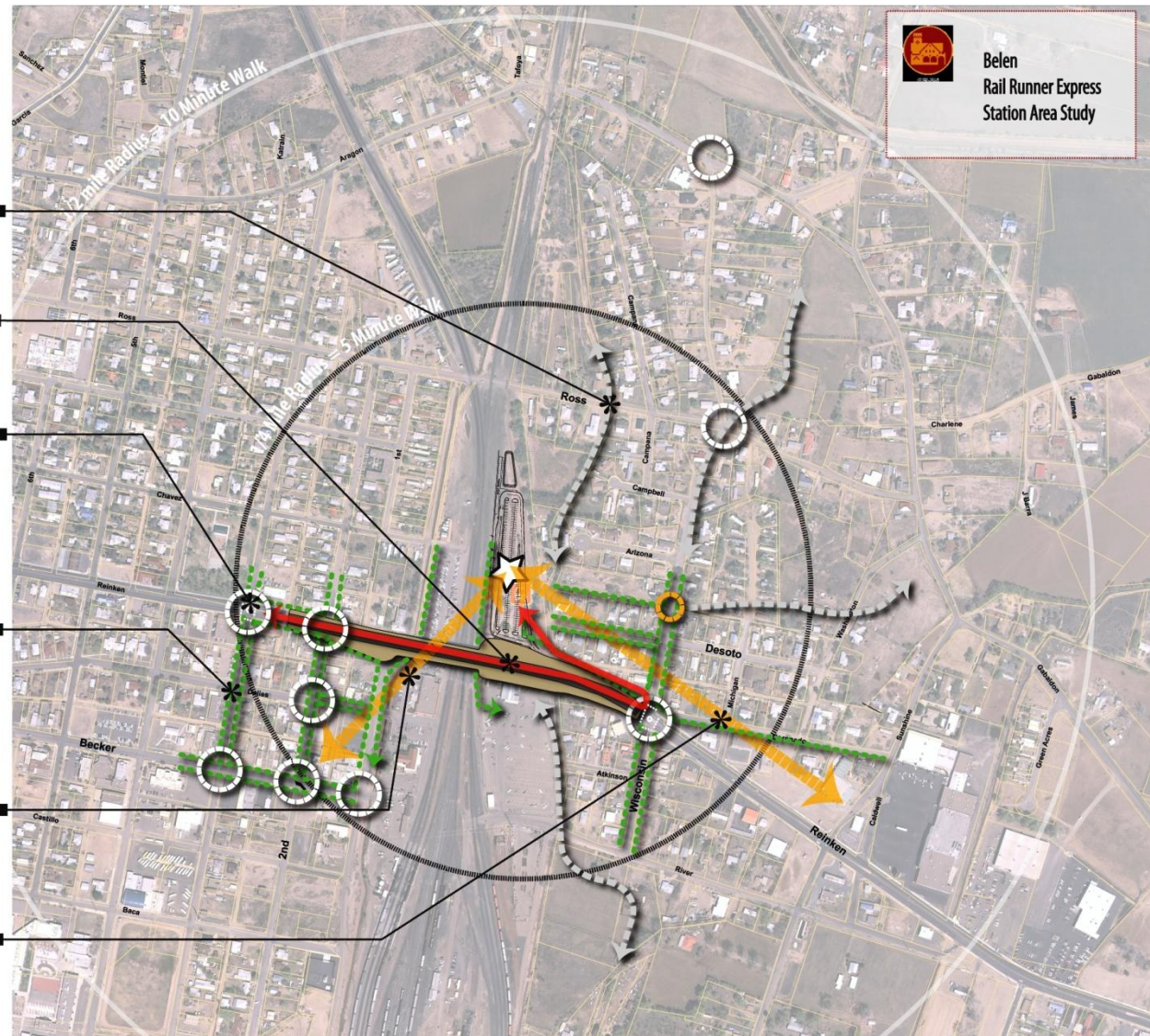


Figure 2 Issues & Opportunities: Pedestrian Connections

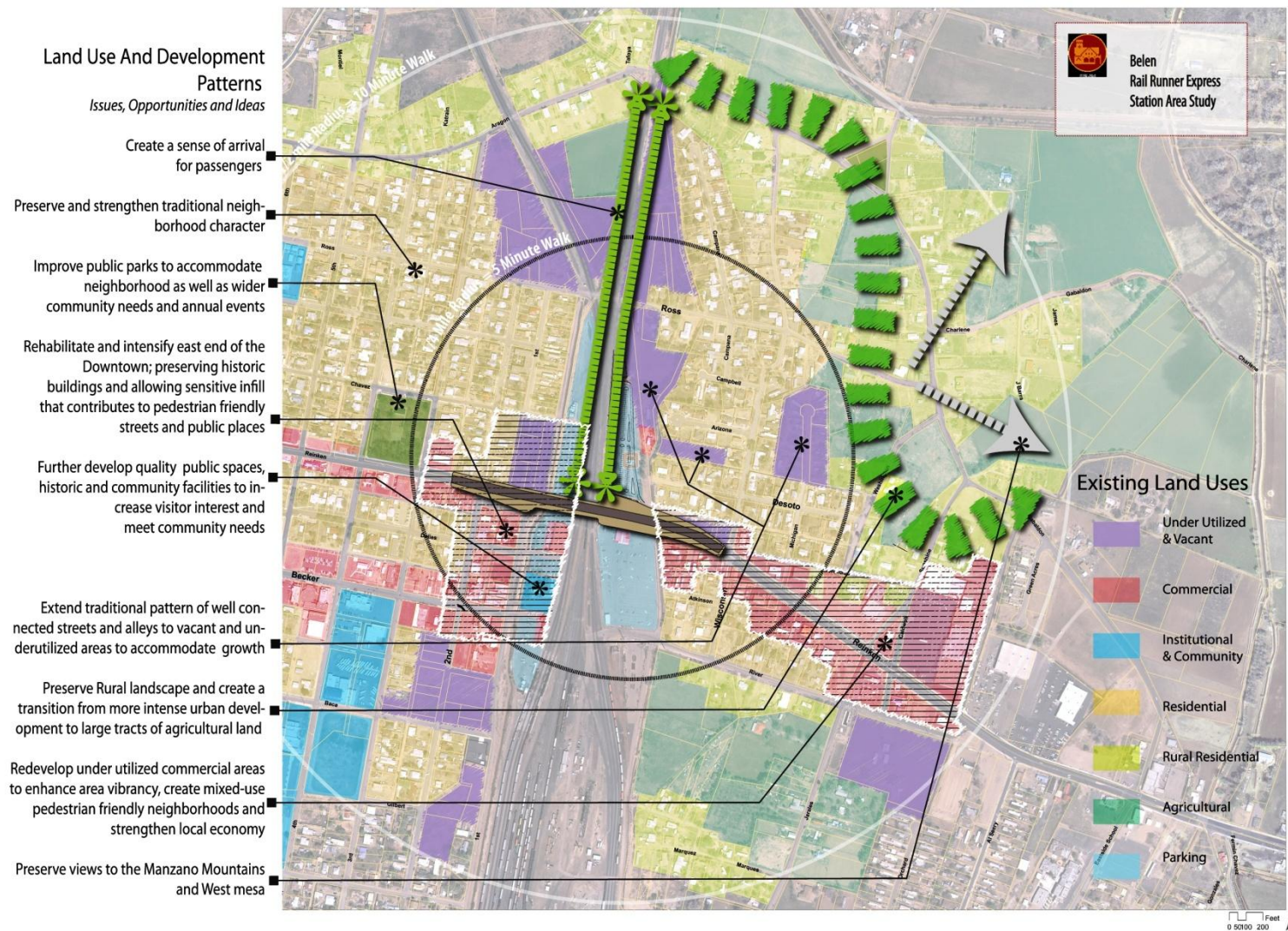


Figure 3 Issues & Opportunities: Land Use & Development Patterns

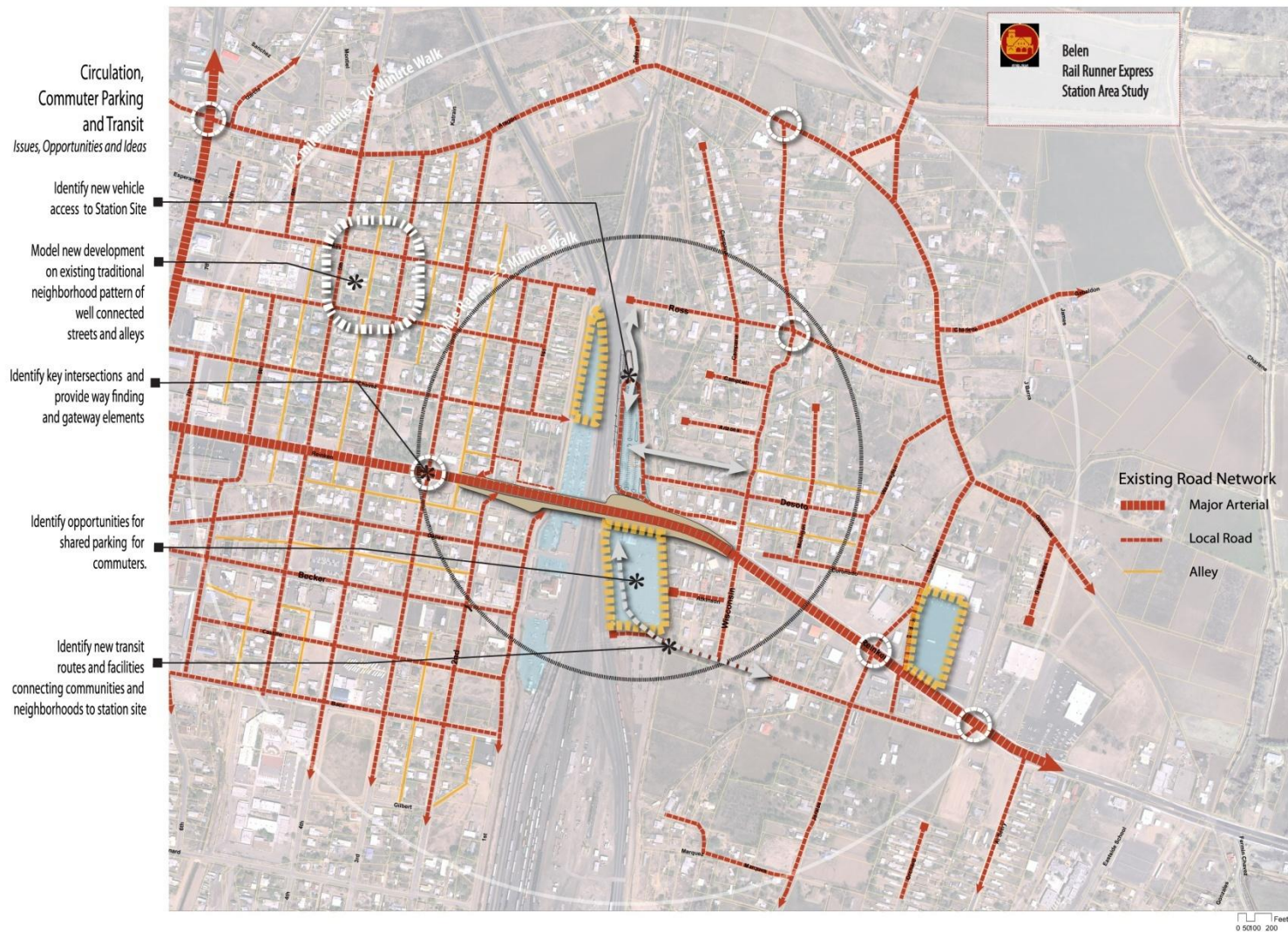


Figure 4 Issues & Opportunities: Circulation, Commuter Parking & Transit

Plan Concepts

The following concepts were developed as a result of analyzing the issues and opportunities in light of the vision. They are used to guide plan elements and recommendations for future improvements.

Homecomings and Arrivals

For Visitors: The importance of inviting public spaces and streets, pedestrian safety and comfort, way finding elements, views from the train and a variety of active places to visit.

For Commuters: The importance of conveniently getting to and from the platform, bicycle routes, parking, transit and facilities like restrooms, public telephones and schedule information.

Walkable Complete Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods with a variety of housing types, pedestrian friendly streets, comfortable public places and convenient shopping, require compact mixed-use development with quality pedestrian and public enhancements; wide sidewalks and paths, shade, parks and plazas that provide places for daily gathering and annual community events.

Where Rail Meets the Trail

Enhancing and building on Belen's unique history as both a turn of the century railroad town and rich legacy as part of the Camino Real during the Spanish and Mexican periods requires preservation of historic buildings and elements, strong visual and

pedestrian connections between attractions and allowing new contemporary development that fits within historic street patterns.

Staying Green

Preserving, enhancing, and connecting with the rural landscape will contribute to a sustainable community. Supporting the farmers, the land and the acequia system close to the heart of Belen will increase available local foods, help to ensure future water supplies, preserve views to the mesas and mountains, and provide green open space that is within walking distance of most homes in the station area. Active support of the functioning rural landscape will also enhance the City's efforts as it seeks new funding for "green" sustainable programs and projects.

PLAN ELEMENTS

Study recommendations are presented under the following plan elements:

- Land Use and Development Patterns
- Station Access, Commuter Parking and Transit
- Key Frontages and Gateways
- Pedestrian Circulation and Connections,
- Bicycle Routes
- Parks and Plazas

Land Use and Development Patterns

There are many opportunities in the planning area to consider redevelopment of both vacant and underutilized parcels as well as enhancing established traditional neighborhoods and key historic properties. Extending the grid of short blocks, tree-lined streets and alleys of the traditional neighborhoods to new development areas will ensure high-level of connectivity and walkable neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and mixed-use shopping and services close by. See Schematic Plan: General Land Use page 31.

Residential Development

Residential Development East of the Tracks

Creating new compact neighborhoods at the block level and allowing infill development in established neighborhoods in both eastern quadrants - north and south- of Reinken Avenue will provide new compact housing within walking distance of the station site and future customers for the underutilized commercial development along east Reinken Avenue. The mix of housing typologies from single family to townhouses and multi-family complexes will ensure a variety of architectural styles, price points and accommodate “in town” life styles.

Traditional Neighborhood Development

Traditional neighborhoods in Belen consists of primarily single family homes on a regular grid of streets and sidewalks with short blocks and alleys that were developed from the early 1900’s to through the 1980’s. East of the station site are several blocks of established single family houses that will continue to accommodate families for many years. Figure 5, Schematic Plan: General Land Uses (page31) and corresponding building typologies shows this area to be part of the larger traditional neighborhood. Generally the plan recommends residential infill on the scattered vacant lots and allowing accessory dwelling units on lots with alley access as a way to stabilize the neighborhood, increase property values and provide affordable housing. Any

new zoning district that allows accessory dwelling units must ensure compliance with local fire codes and include appropriate parking standards.

Multi Family Neighborhood Development

Just north of the station site between the acequia and the rail yard are several vacant and underutilized lots that are appropriately located and large enough to accommodate multi-family housing. Figure 5, Schematic Plan: General Land Uses on page 31, shows this area as a multi-family neighborhood which should be master planned in order to ensure efficient utility placement, safe circulation, landscaping and drainage, adequate buffering from the rail yards, sufficient parking and appropriate building placement and orientation.

Compact Neighborhood Development

Directly east of the site is a long vacant parcel that can accommodate two story compact townhouses and provide a new entrance for both cars and pedestrians to the station site from Wisconsin Street. This will reduce traffic on Desoto Avenue while providing access to the backs of properties on the north side of Desoto Avenue creating the opportunity for accessory dwelling units and garages. The schematic plan shows this area as compact neighborhood development which will require sensitive building placement and design to fit in with the surrounding established neighborhood.

Within a 5 to 10 minute walk of the station site north and south of Reinken Avenue are large areas of underutilized and vacant lots that should be redeveloped at the block level to accommodate

new townhouses, duplexes and single family residences. Figure 5, Schematic Plan: General Land Uses on page 31 shows these areas as compact neighborhoods on blocks created by extending the traditional grid of streets and alleys. Properties that are currently in use and viable as residential units should remain and should be included on master plans at the block level.

Clustered Rural Residential Transition Zone

There are large tracks of agricultural land and rural residential neighborhoods within walking distance of the station site that provide unique amenities such as amazing views to the mountains, open space, and functioning acequia system that keeps the area lush and inviting. Treating this area as a transition zone between the town site and the large tracts of agricultural fields that follow the river provides an opportunity to keep the rural character close to the more dense downtown neighborhoods while envisioning new limited clustered residential development that reduces minimum lot size to set aside portion of the gross area as contiguous common open space for agriculture or recreational use. The schematic plan identifies key tracks of agricultural land for preservation and possible community agriculture as well as designating adjacent parcels particularly along Argon Road as clustered rural residential neighborhoods. Creating a transition zone will enhance the City's efforts and dialogue with other communities for a larger conservation district north into the Tome area and further recommendations presented by Lance Davison, Urban Forester with State forestry.

Residential Development West of the Tracks

Most of the area west of the tracks within a ½ mile radius of the station site is on a traditional grid of well connected small blocks, streets and alleys that accommodates both the historic downtown commercial and institutional development as well as walkable compact residential neighborhoods. Keeping the established block pattern while allowing more intense infill development, mixed-use building types along with rehabilitating historic properties to accommodate new uses will extend the boundaries and contribute to the objectives of the "Heart of Belen" project.

Traditional Neighborhood Development

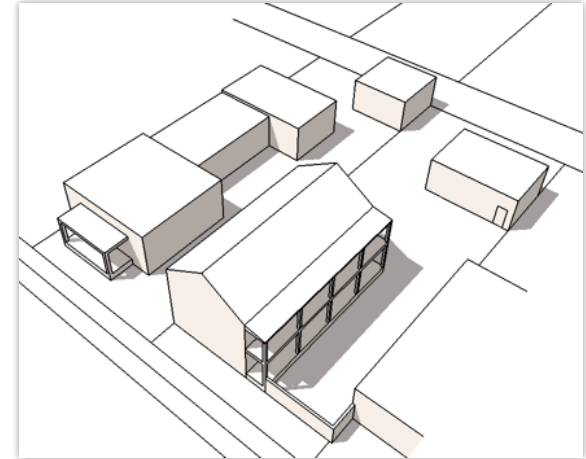
Figure 5, Schematic Plan: General Land Use on page 31 shows most of this area as traditional neighborhood and the corresponding building typologies are modeled after the variety of housing types found in the historic neighborhoods. Encouraging infill that follows established setbacks and allowing accessory dwelling units for parcels with alley access can reinforce the pattern while stabilizing areas in decline and adding to the vibrancy of a high value area.

Compact Neighborhood Development

The exception to the pattern north of Reinken Avenue is the residential area adjacent to the tracks. This area is seen as affordable and should remain so. However there is a need for more protection from noise and vibrations of the rail yard. A compact neighborhood pattern using manufactured houses or attached site built houses with a continuous line of attached

garages to form a buffer can provide added protection and remain affordable.

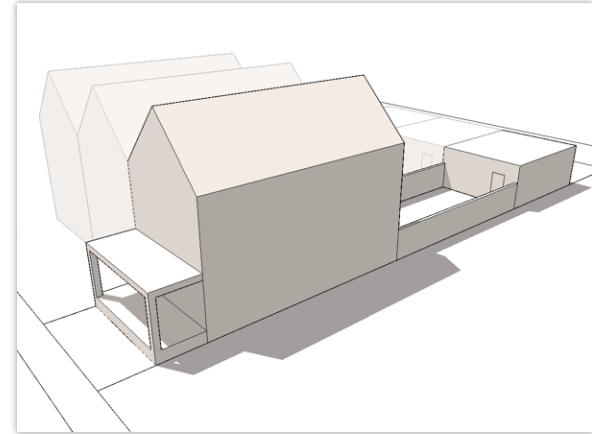
Just south of the downtown core fronting 2nd Street from Castillo Avenue to Baca Avenue are several contiguous vacant lots that are appropriately located and can accommodate ground related 2-3 story townhouses. These homes can provide a 24 hour presence to the east end of downtown and an urban lifestyle for residents.



Traditional Neighborhood

Housing Typologies:

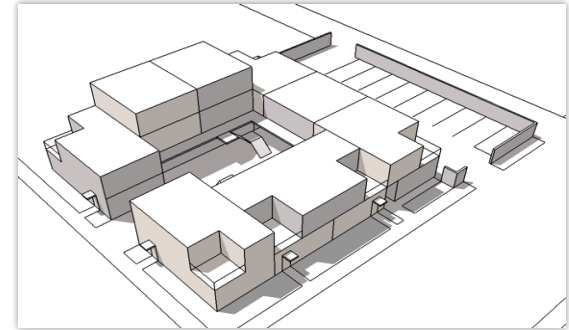
- Single Family
- Side Yard Dwelling
- Duplex , Triplex, Quads
- Accessory Dwelling unit



Compact Neighborhood

Housing Typologies:

- Single Family
- Side Yard Dwelling
- Duplex , Triplex, Quads
- Accessory Dwelling units
- Row Houses & Townhouses



Multi-Family Neighborhood

Housing Typologies:

- Row Houses & Townhouses
- Terraced Apartments
- Courtyard Apartments



Clustered Rural Residential Neighborhood

Building Typologies

- Family Compounds
- Clustered housing sharing open commons and parking
- Single Family

Commercial Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Allowing mixed-uses including office and residential uses and increasing intensities on commercial properties in conjunction with new residential development in the neighborhoods may revitalize the commercial activities of the station area. This will provide the surrounding neighborhoods with commercial services and employment opportunities that are within walking distance of their homes and contribute to the local economy.

Commercial Development East of the Tracks:

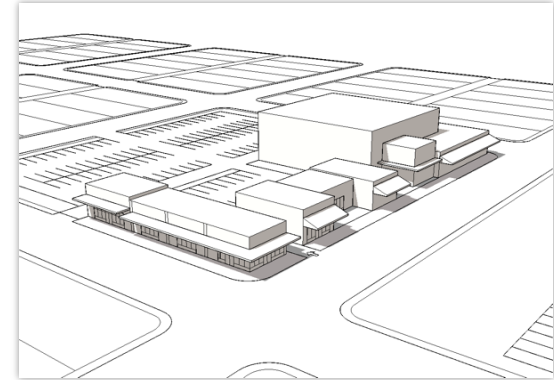
Figure 5, Schematic Plan: General Land Use on page 31 shows commercial redevelopment and new access on vacant and underutilized properties that front Reinken Avenue east of the rail yards. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings, improved landscaping, shared parking behind buildings, façade improvements with elements such as portals, courtyards, frequent and inviting entrances can help to create a live/work and shopping environment that is more inviting and vibrant.

The station site is located in a primarily residential district with the exception of the Rail Café which fronts the station parking lot and provides a welcoming place for visitors and commuters to take respite and gather information. It should remain a commercial establishment and be allowed to add on to the building as part of any expansion of the station site.

Commercial Development West of the Tracks

The historic Kuhn Hotel site as well as the surrounding parcels between First and Second Street from the Reinken Avenue Overpass to Chaves Avenue on the north is underutilized. This area is seen as an area of opportunity that, with improved pedestrian and vehicle access, increased intensity and a variety of uses, will enhance the vitality of the station area and provide an important and necessary connection from the station site to the “Heart of Belen”. Architectural styles and scale should be clearly linked to the historic Kuhn hotel and provide a welcoming front façade oriented to the station site across the tracks. Due to the noise and vibrations of the rail tracks day-time uses such offices, retail and restaurants should be encouraged over residential uses.

Most commercial properties located south of the Reinken Avenue Overpass to Castillo Avenue between 1st and 2nd Street are currently underutilized or vacant. This area contains many historic structures that should be rehabilitated to accommodate new uses with an emphasis on ground floor retail that is oriented to the street. To increase vibrancy and complete the historic fabric, new infill development that follows established setbacks, heights and guidelines of the Becker Street Ordinance should be allowed on underutilized and vacant lots. All new and redevelopment projects should be master planned at the block level showing existing buildings, improved access, shared parking behind the buildings and integrated landscaping that provides seating, shade and way finding elements for pedestrians.



Commercial Redevelopment

Building Typologies:

- Liner Building
- Live Work
- Stand Alone Commercial
- Adaptive Reuse



Examples of active open yard uses.

Supporting Agriculture, Recreation and Alternative Energy

There is an opportunity to locate a variety of open yard facilities on vacant land between the tracks south of Aragon Road Overpass and on underutilized land fronting the tracks north of Ross Avenue. Due to drainage issues, limited access and proximity to the rail yards this area is seen unsuitable for commercial or residential uses. Possible uses include BMX bike or skate park, composting and/or nursery, and a site for solar panels or wind turbines.

Community Agriculture

Belen is a community with deep rural roots that are still prevalent today. Up and down the Rio Grande Valley, there is an interest in community agriculture, community gardens and community food production that capitalizes on the demand for locally grown organic food. With its rich rural landscape, farming traditions and proximity to the market in Albuquerque, Belen is well positioned to foster agriculture incubation. However, there are increased pressures threatening the future of agriculture as it competes with development for both land and water.

Within the station planning area there are large agricultural properties in production as pasture or growing alfalfa. These lands provide valuable open space and help to preserve the functioning acequia system and long range views to the mountains. There is an opportunity to preserve these areas as productive landscapes for historical, community, economic and educational purposes.

The schematic plan identifies a transition zone between the denser compact neighborhoods and the outlying rural areas with shared community gardens and agricultural uses in conjunction with clustered rural residential development. This allows for non-agricultural residential development to occur on a small portion of agricultural land while preserving the remaining land for agricultural uses. It is envisioned that the agricultural portion of the land in the transition zone accommodate community gardens or agricultural activities farmed and leased by individuals or community groups. This method is a compromise between those

that want to protect agricultural land and those that want to be able to develop their land. The agricultural portion of the land can be owned by the owner/developer, but can not be further developed, and should be held under a conservation easement by a non-profit land trust organization. Family transfers of land can occur, while still preserving agricultural land. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between the landowner and a government agency or private conservation organization. A conservation easement ensures protection of agriculture resources today and into the future. The restrictions on the property can cover the entire property or portions of the property. Conservation easements provide tax incentives to farmers to protect their land. However, conservation easements require a qualified conservation organization, such as the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, or public agency to monitor and enforce the restrictions.



Example of community gardens.

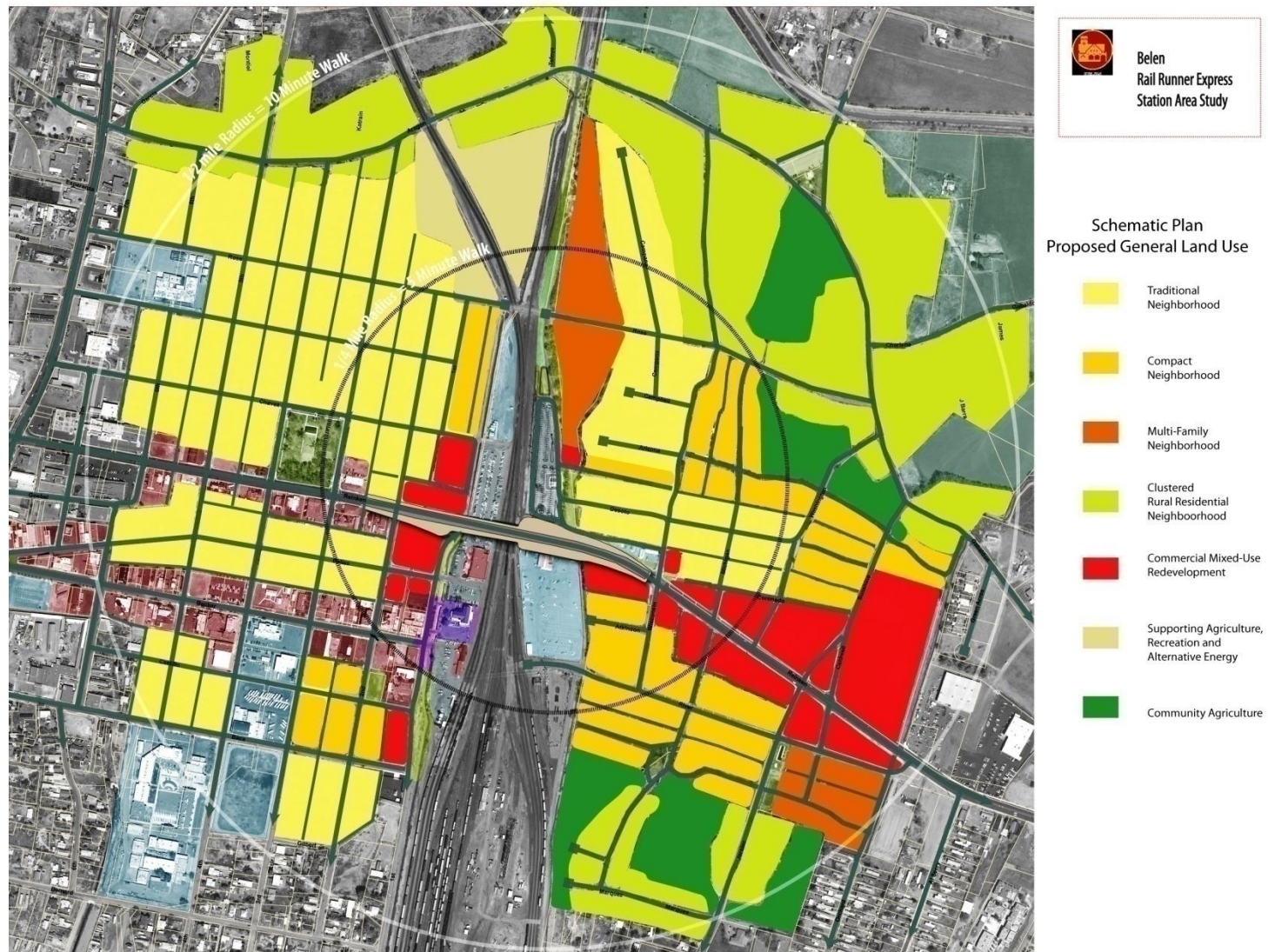


Figure 5 Schematic Plan: General Land Use



Commuter Parking continues to increase at the station site.

Circulation, Commuter Parking, Station Access, and Transit

The Belen Rail Runner Express Station serves many commuters who live in outlying communities and households that are not within walking distance of the station or transit routes. This requires driving to the station and has created the need for additional commuter parking and better access to the station site. Increasing transit options both in and out of town, creating additional parking and improving access and circulation in and out of the station area will reduce travel times for commuters and increase ridership.

Circulation

Proposed new streets and alleys are primarily a response to land use patterns and to maintaining and connecting to the existing grid of short blocks, tree-lined local streets and back alleys. Adjustments are naturally made to transition from the grid to the more organic circulation and land use pattern of the rural areas. See Figure 6 Schematic Plan: Circulation, Commuter Parking and Transit, page 35.

Commuter Parking

There are several opportunities to develop additional commuter parking that is convenient to the station site. For the immediate future there may be an opportunity to locate temporary parking on vacant land north of the station site. Additionally, if a shuttle is provided, temporary parking could be accommodated on the large parking lots associated with the vacant super market at Reinken Avenue and Caldwell Avenue. However, these should be considered as very temporary solutions. Permanent commercial and residential developments are the most appropriate and highest use for these areas.

In the long run, the most appropriate location for additional commuter parking is the BNSF parking lot just south of the Reinken Avenue Overpass. There is an opportunity to create a shared parking lot that meets the needs of BNSF and future commuters. In order to take advantage of this location a pedestrian connection to the platform should be made that is convenient, safe and does not interfere with BNSF operations. There is an opportunity and space to create a pedestrian path

under the overpass along the existing road used by BNSF vehicles. There may also be an opportunity to create a pedestrian connection as part of a mixed use office development or parking structure that is connected to and provides public access to the upper levels of the overpass.

In conjunction with commuter parking and convenient pedestrian connections to the platform, this site should also be considered for a transit drop off location or future transit facility that includes commercial uses catering to the commuters and possibly offices for BNSF.

Another possibility is commuter parking on vacant land west of the tracks north of Chaves Avenue and east of the acequia. This is realistic if convenient pedestrian crossing on the Reinken Avenue Overpass is developed.

A limited amount of new parking may become available at the station site if additional land is acquired for new facilities such as a transit center.

Station Access

Additionally, vehicle and transit access to the station site needs to be improved to reduce the time it takes to get in and out of the station.

There is an opportunity to plan for new access to the station as a part of the redevelopment of several of the surrounding vacant

lots. Better access will relieve congestion in and out of the station site.

A new road paralleling the tracks from Aragon Road just east of where it crosses the tracks to the north end of station parking lot should be considered as adjacent vacant property is planned and developed. It should be designed as a parkway with transit lanes, landscaping, bike routes and pedestrian pathways as well as landscape features oriented to the views from the Rail Runner Express.

A new vehicle and pedestrian entrance to the station site from Wisconsin Street should be considered as the vacant lot east of the station site is planned and developed. The new entrance can be integrated with new residential development and provide pedestrian friendly street design and signage while reducing traffic and parking issues associated with residents on Desoto Avenue.

Transit

As the Rio Metro Regional Transit District expands to serve more commuters, transit routes to the station site should be designated and locations for transit stops carefully considered within the larger circulation pattern of the city and region. Figure 6, Schematic Plan: Circulation, Commuter Parking and Transit on page, identifies two new transit routes within the station area if proposed station access points are developed. Both proposed transit routes are adjacent to proposed multifamily housing and avoid the congestion associated with the intersection at Reinken Avenue and Wisconsin Street.

A transit route for trips coming from development east and south of the tracks (Rio Communities, UNM Valencia Campus, businesses along N.M. 304, Veguita, Jarales, Bosque and Pueblitos), should be designated on River Rd with the drop-off point for the station site located just south of the Reinken Avenue Overpass on BNSF Property. This will require a short pedestrian pathway under the overpass to the platform.

Another transit route should be designated on the proposed parkway road that parallels the tracks from Aragon Road to the station site to accommodate trips from north and west of the tracks.

A shuttle that circulates between the historic district and the station site geared towards visitors who come on the train should be considered particularly during annual cultural events.

A transit facility should be considered either at the current station site or on BNSF property south of the overpass as part of the

transit drop location. Both sites are currently underutilized and are conveniently located with proposed access and transit routes. Transit facilities can meet a wide variety of community needs including areas for public events but at a minimum should include restrooms, an emergency phone and an information kiosk for commuters, visitors and transit employees.



Shuttle Van service can connect visitors to attractions and annual events.



Figure 6 Schematic Plan: Circulation, Commuter Parking and Transit

Pedestrian Circulation & Connections

Safe, comfortable and convenient pedestrian connections from the station site to the surrounding neighborhoods, regional trails and the downtown core are essential to realizing the vision for the station area.

Reinken Avenue Overpass Crossing

Several options for improving the pedestrian crossing from the station site over the tracks to the west side were developed and explored during the planning process. Figure 7 Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Circulation and Connections page 43 shows the option most likely to be accepted by all stakeholders including BNSF, NMDOT and the City of Belen. This option uses the current overpass with the following improvements:

- Two elevators on the north side of the overpass, one located at the south end of the station site and one on the BNSF parking lot west of the tracks.
- Steps from the station site up the overpass apron to the top of the overpass.
- Decreasing the width of traffic lanes and widening the sidewalks on both the north and south sides of the overpass from Wisconsin Street to 3rd Street,
- A designated viewing area located on the north side of the overpass associated with the elevators.
- Improved fencing to provide security for the rail yard from the overpass and better viewing opportunities for the pedestrians.



Example of outdoor public elevator.



Wayfinding elements and safety barriers between traffic and pedestrians.

Convenient pedestrian connections and amenities should also be a major component of any new commercial development, community facility or parking structure being considered for development on parcels adjacent to the overpass.

All pedestrian connections and amenities on areas adjacent to the rail tracks or as part of the overpass should be carefully analyzed to make sure they are compliant with BNSF's security objectives for local operations.

Outdoor public elevators may attract vandals and the design must consider ways to prevent vandalism. While it is impossible to prevent all vandalism in elevators, there are several steps to reduce the frequency and impact of vandalism. For example, installing vandal-resistant interiors and control panels in the elevator cabs will reduce the number of incidents and costs to repair damage. Visibility of entrances and hours of operation are also other factors that should be considered in strategically dealing with vandalism.



Example of outdoor public elevator.

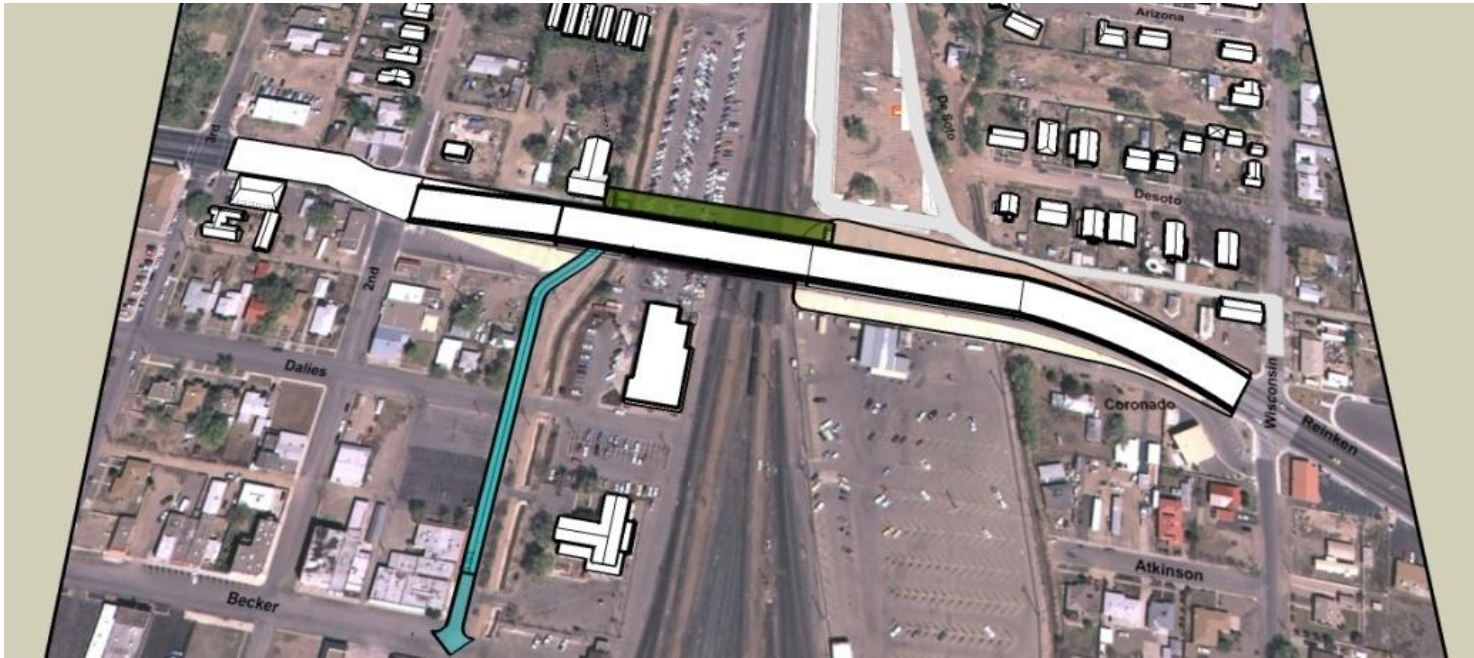


Figure 7 Reinken Overpass Pedestrian Crossing



Study options for improving pedestrian crossings

Key Intersections

The schematic plan identifies the following intersections as key pedestrian connections that are in need of pedestrian improvements:

Wisconsin and Reinken Avenue

This intersection is signalized and is an important north/south crossing for pedestrians. The primary concern at this intersection is pedestrian safety. The issue results from Reinken Ave, a wide urban arterial carrying local as well as through traffic, having four travel lanes with a narrow median and left turn lane. There is a need to narrow the distance of asphalt that a pedestrian has to cross, improve visibility of pedestrians by drivers and slow turning speeds for vehicles turning right on to Wisconsin. Curb extensions or bulb outs, raised crosswalks and/or widening the median to provide a pedestrian refuge should be considered.

2nd Street and Reinken Avenue

This is an unsignalized intersection and not a safe north/south crossing due to poor visibility and high traffic speeds on Reinken. Improvements such as higher median barrier and/or signage should be added to discourage pedestrian crossing.

3rd Street and Reinken Ave

This is a key intersection providing the first signalized crossing for pedestrians after the Reinken Avenue Overpass and important connection for pedestrians who are walking to the downtown core from the station. In addition to the issues and recommendations for the intersection at Wisconsin and Reinken,

strong way finding elements, such as distinctive paving, signage and landscaping, should be integrated into any intersection improvements.



Example of a raised crosswalk.



Example of bulb outs.

Pedestrian Friendly Streets

New residential streets should be narrow, enhanced with street trees in landscape buffers and include continuous minimum 5' wide sidewalks. The “Heart of Belen” project should be extended to include pedestrian enhancements and street standards on both sides of 3rd Street from Reinken Avenue to Becker and 2nd Street from Reinken Avenue to Castillo. First Street should be redeveloped to include pedestrian enhancements and way finding elements as part of the Harvey House Plaza and redevelopment of the Kuhn Hotel site. All streets need pedestrian-scale lighting features and safe designated crossings.



Example of encroachment for shade



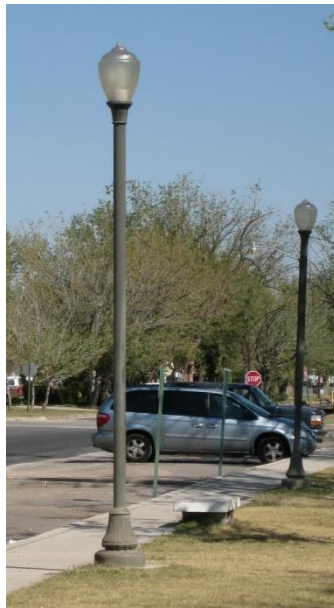
Shade provided by street trees in the planting strip.



Becker Street redevelopment enhances pedestrian experience.

Way Finding

Information about the history, culture and directions to attractions can be expressed in a variety of elements throughout the station area. Street furniture, paving treatments, public art, signage and plantings should all be integrated in a station area master landscape plan with an emphasis on way finding.



Local and global examples of wayfinding, pedestrian safety and comfort elements.



Multi-purpose Pathways

The schematic plan shows several off-street multi-purpose pathways along the acequias on both sides of the tracks. The pathways are intended to draw pedestrian and bicyclists from throughout the area and connect with developing regional trails including the Rio Grande Trail. Residents and visitors will use the pathways for recreation and in many cases as more direct access to the station site and downtown, particularly along the acequia that parallels 1st Street. Pathway facilities should be at least 10' wide and include benches, trash receptacles and signage.

Station Area Shuttle

A shuttle van that circulates between the historic district and the station site geared towards visitors who come on the train should be considered particularly during annual cultural events.



Acequias can provide pedestrian connections throughout Belen and larger regional trails

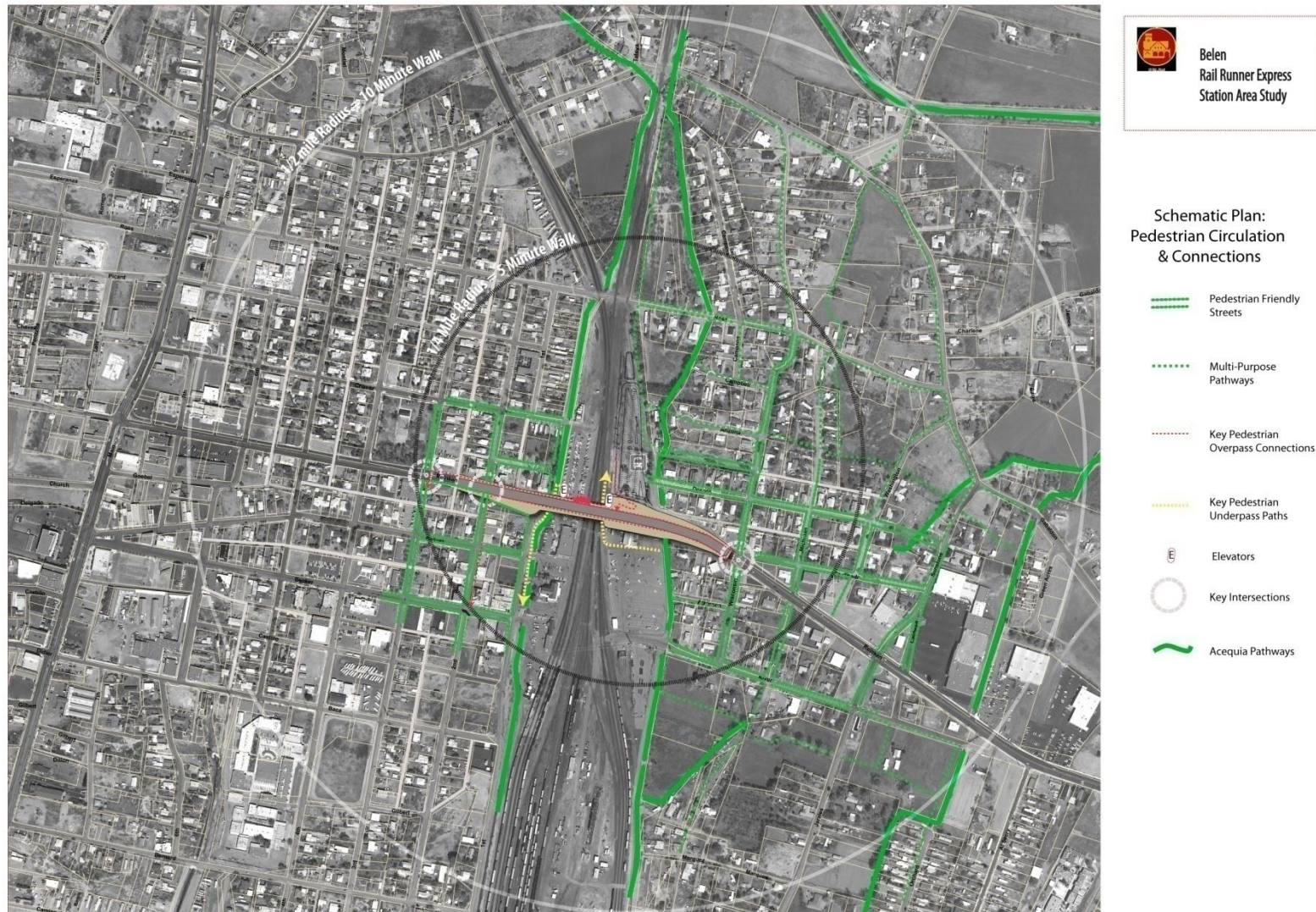


Figure 8 Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Circulation & Connections

Bicycle Routes

Areas that are within a two mile radius of the station site can be covered by bicyclists in ten minutes. Commuting to the Rail Runner Express on bicycles continues to increase locally. Nationally the trend for both commuting to work and as recreation has resulted in thousands of miles of new routes and trails. Several bicycle routes in the station area have been identified in the Valencia County Mobility Plan as “existing

routes”; although they may not be engineered for designation as existing routes. A study of Reinken Avenue, Ross Avenue, Aragon Road, Main Street and Jarales Road should be conducted to see if these routes can be safely designated and signed as bicycle routes with specific connections to the station site for commuters and visitors.

To support bicycle commuters who take the Rail Runner Express, secure bicycle storage should be added as part of any new station site improvements.



Example of designated bike route on existing street.



Bicyclists on the Rio Grande Trail

Key Frontages and Gateways

The Rail Runner Express has created a new gateway into Belen. Locating arrival art or gateways and landscaping areas that front the tracks well before the train pulls up to the platform is important to creating a sense of arrival. Once visitors step down to the platform they should not have to look far to understand that they have arrived at their destination and are ready to explore. Welcoming frontages and way finding elements visible from the platform can reassure visitors that Belen is a safe, comfortable and interesting place to visit. All of the arrival elements should be designed and planned as an integrated system that express community identity, history while providing clear directions to points of interest and community facilities. For further information please refer to the “Arrival Park” description on page 49.

Figure 9, Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Connections and Plazas & Parks on page 50 identifies key frontages on several buildings, parking lots and open spaces that front the tracks as well as locations for arrival “gateways”. The first of the gateways is located at the intersection of the tracks and Aragon Road. The second is at the intersection of Ross Avenue and the tracks and the third is the north façade of the Reinken Avenue Overpass. Key building and parking lot frontages include the Harvey House Museum site, the BNSF offices and parking lots, The Kuhn Hotel, the Rail Café, the station site parking lot and any new development on the station site.



Harvey House Museum and BNSF Admin office are visible from the platform



Parking lot frontage visible from the platform

Parks and Plazas

Redevelopment in the station area provides an opportunity to expand the City of Belen's network of parks and plazas and support the community tradition of la resolana; daily socializing with your friends and neighbors in favorite gathering spots. Comfortable and accessible outdoor gathering places will attract locals and visitors and provide spaces for a variety of functions:

- Socializing and relaxing
- Public events and activities
- Historic and cultural expression
- Integrated energy generation

In addition to neighborhood parks associated with proposed residential development on east of the tracks and new courtyards, plazuelas, pocket parks and pedestrian friendly streets associated with proposed commercial mixed-use development the following public outdoor gathering spaces are identified on the schematic plan:

- The Harvey House Museum and First Street Plaza
- Plaza Vieja
- Arrival Park



Santa Fe Rail Yard Plaza

Harvey House/ First Street Plaza

The “Heart of Belen” Project identified the area at the intersection of Becker Avenue and 1st Street including the Harvey House Site as a key location for a downtown plaza. The Harvey House Site is just north of the intersection and out of direct alignment with Becker Avenue. Creating a plaza area that ties the intersection of 1st Street and Becker Avenue with the Harvey house site will create an active outdoor gathering space that enhances the overall pedestrian environment, provides a sense of place and continues the vision of the “Heart of Belen” Project .

It is envisioned as a high use area and focal point of the historic district. As a major public plaza the following things need to be considered:

- Determine plaza function, size and activities.
- Respond to micro climate in the plaza design.
- Consider views, circulation, boundaries and subspaces particularly as they relate to Becker Avenue, 1st street, the Acequia , the Harvey House and the Rail Yard.
- Provide appropriate amount of seating.
- Provide an abundance of shade with trees and portals.
- Provide interactive civic art and fountains.
- Increase safety through wayfinding, lighting and visibility.



View from the Harvey House towards Becker Ave & the Heart of Belen



Example of a public plaza with street and building frontage.

Plaza Vieja

One block south of the intersection of Wisconsin Street and Ross Avenue is the site of the original Catholic Church in Belen which was moved after flooding destroyed most of the buildings in the

area. The site is currently a private residence. There is an opportunity to consider redeveloping it as a historic landmark which can also function as small neighborhood community center and park that provides a play area for children, a plaza designed for neighborhood events and shade and seating for everyday use.



Arrival Park

The views from the train and the experience of both commuters and visitors when they arrive can be greatly enhanced with landscaping and public art. Treating the experience as a long unified park from the intersection of the tracks with Aragon Road to the Reinken Avenue Overpass including the station site can create a sense that this is a safe, comfortable and interesting place to visit or call home. Part of the concept should include an active civic presence either as part of public facilities or transit center at the station site or regular events such as farmers markets and organized tours that start at the station. Landscape features should be integrated and include public art, wayfinding elements, furniture, water features, trees and plantings that reflect the agricultural heritage and sustainable water harvesting and drainage practices. The Arrival Park should be integrated with the larger station area landscape master plan and include pedestrian pathways and connections along the acequia that parallels 1st Street, key building and parking lot frontages, and the proposed parkway road that parallels the tracks from Aragon Road to the station site.



Santa Fe Rail Yard views on arrival



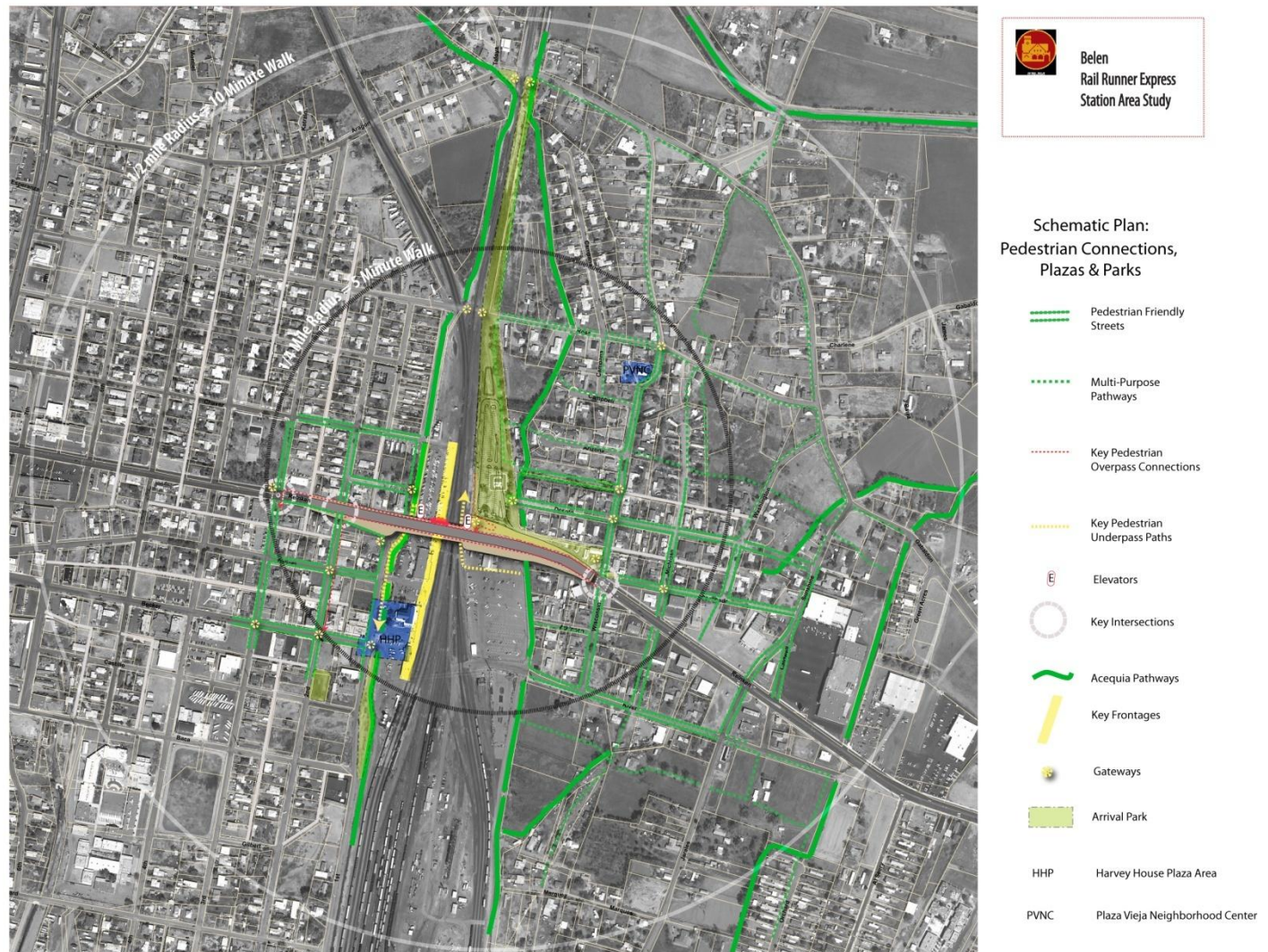


Figure 9 Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Connections and Plazas & Parks

ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

The following illustrative plan and perspectives are intended to show building placement, public space configurations, commuter parking options, street locations and improvements, open space and pathways that are consistent with the vision, key elements and proposed projects identified during the planning process. It is for illustrative purposes and to be used as a guide for decision-makers as they consider future plans, proposals, zoning and policies for development in the station area.

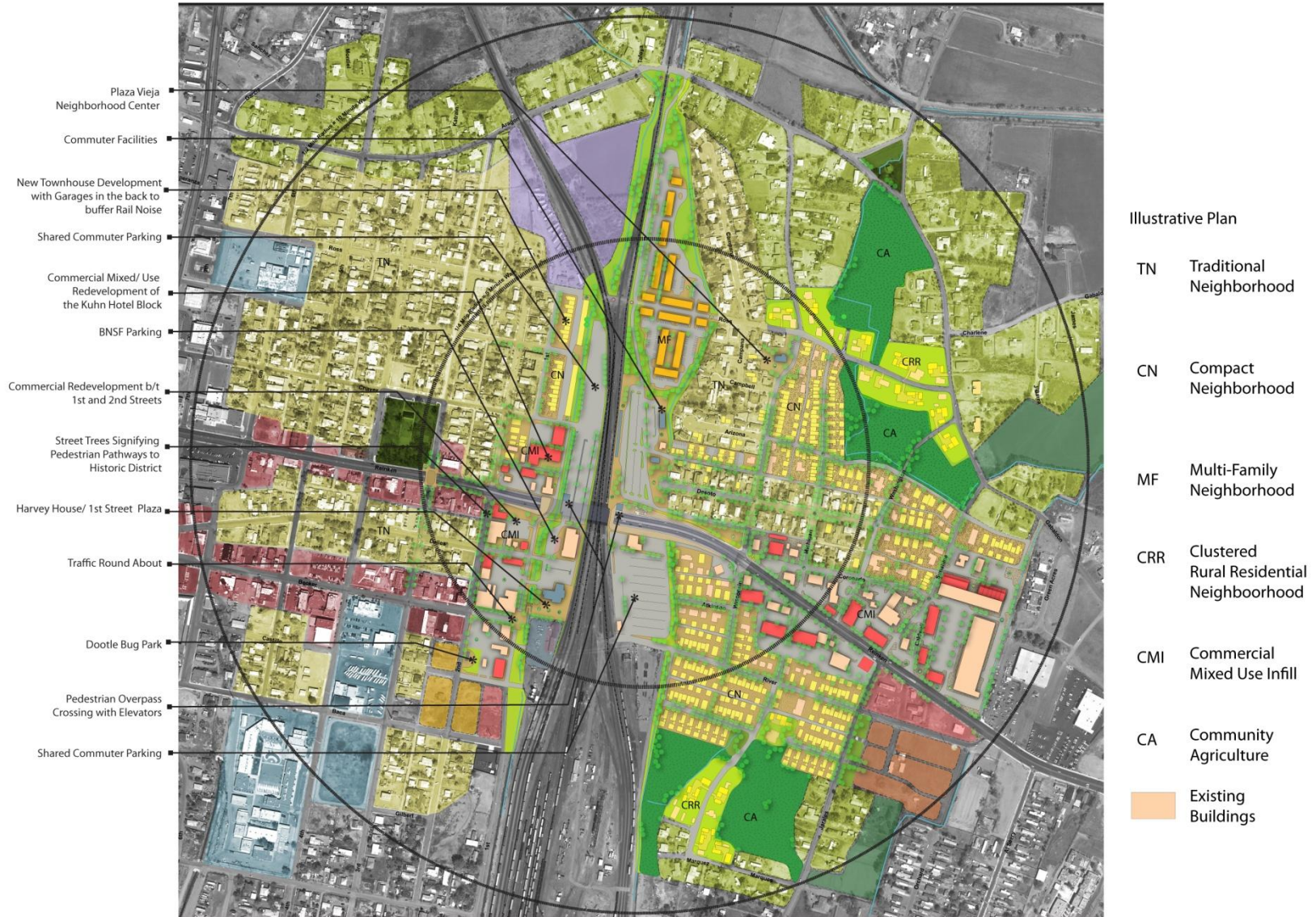


Figure 10 Illustrative Plan



Conceptual Illustration: View looking south from station site; elevators at east and west side of overpass.



Conceptual Illustration: Residential development north of the station site.

